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Review: The Marvelous Ointments of Dr. Duerr

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Review by: Ioan Petru Culianu

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Master and Savior" by Joseph Kitagawa; "The Death and 'Lives' of Poet-Monk Saigyō" by William La Fleur; "The Loneliness of Matsuo Bashō" by James Foard; and "Lincoln's Martyrdom" by Donald Capps. The first two by Kitagawa and La Fleur are true contributions to the study of religious biography. Kitagawa's is elegant and has the kind of completeness one would expect from him. La Fleur's is less well sculpted, but it, too, is well done, especially in its depiction of Saigyō in its medieval Japanese Buddhist context. La Fleur controls the Japanese and Indian Buddhist materials and illuminates both by his careful exposure of what is particularly Japanese about his subject. Moreover, both Kitagawa and La Fleur seem to understand the dialectic inherent in the volume's project as a whole. By comparison, Foard's study of Bashō, while finely detailed and intelligently done, seems, like its title, somewhat "lonely" in this collection. Finally, Donald Capps gives us an Eriksonian analysis of Abraham Lincoln—enough said.

Before concluding, I have one additional impression, or rather a question: Why is there no study of the "life of Jesus"? This is a simply terrible omission in such a work. One suspects it is another instance of Chicago's "double standard," there is (a) history of religions and (b) history of Christianity. As long as this parochial view reigns, the subject has not liberated itself from the apologetics of earlier ages. Similarly, as an extension of this issue, there is nothing on the biblical or Jewish tradition.

Though I have been critical of aspects of this work I must conclude, and not merely for the sake of "appearances," with high commendation for this volume. It stems from the fact that not only does the collection contain important individual contributions as noted, but it strikes out in new ways on a very important subject for anyone interested in the history of religions. I predict it will encourage many new studies and in time, therefore, will be seen as something of a "venerable ancestor" in a tradition of scholarly research it will have helped to generate and to shape.

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THE MARVELOUS OINTMENTS OF DR. DUERR

Traumzeit. Über die Grenze zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation. By HANS PETER DUERR. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1978. Pp. 415, 26 plates.

Some authors have claimed that witches had two sorts of ointments: a white one to fly with, and a black one to conjure with. Hans Peter Duerr employed both of them in this work: he anointed himself with the first when writing his text for the layman (pp. 11–161), and with the second when writing his notes and bibliography for the specialist (pp. 163–405). Thus, *Traumzeit* became both a readable and a reliable book, one of the best documented works on witchcraft to have appeared in the last decade.

A reader who expects from it something à la Murray or à la Trevor Roper or even à la Henry Charles Lea will certainly be disappointed. Duerr belongs essentially to the new wave of counterculture, though he also appears to be

something of a phenomenologist who owes much to Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. As he puts it, with a touch of irony, he is a lonely scholar, doomed to be shut out from both the world of "speaking animals" and the world of "speaking anthropologists" (p. 161); that is, he is determined neither to buy a one-way ticket for a "trip" nor to let the rationalists take over entirely.

This Teutonic wizard took a large cauldron (415 pages altogether) and mixed together the following ingredients, in unequal proportion: history of witchcraft, Australian aborigines, shamanism, African werewolves, South American *yagé*, obscene Austrian cults, Hungarian *taltos*, bacchanals, saturnalias and other paraphernalia related to the Great Mother, hallucinogens, nightmares, trips, the vagina of the earth, and the history of fashion. His familiars were perched on the left shoulder (Carlos Castaneda) and on the right shoulder (Paul Feyerabend), as he went about constantly mumbling wise words from Michel Foucault and Nobeert Elias, from Claude Lévi-Strauss and Theodore Adorno. His magic wand was cut out of the world-tree, the Eliade tree, that is the pillar of the history of religions.

He skimmed off the foam (using the phenomenological method) and made it into the white ointment of the witches; what remained in the cauldron was the ointment of scholars, that is as black as hell. If one were strong enough to use that first ointment, and dared to use it, what might one get? An endless flight on which could be glimpsed, *à vol d'oiseau*, various sites from Australia to South America and from Africa to Scandinavia, and various strange rites, practices, and stories related to initiation, antinomianism, ingestion of drugs, ethnobotany, cultural and moral repression, perversion and fashion. There is an amazing amount of information here, carefully selected and presented to the reader in a pattern set by certain assumptions connected with both epistemology and the history of ideas. The first chapters expand upon the hypothesis that an uninterrupted continuity runs from the archaic cults of a Great Mother to witchcraft, the latter being merely an invention of the Inquisition and depending on the existence of an atemporal tradition of outsiders and liminal people who either used drugs or simply engaged in antinomian rites.

The second part of the book is an attempt to clarify, with the aid of concepts forged by Feyerabend, the intriguing problem of what Castaneda calls "non-ordinary reality," that is, a state of consciousness in which things are not experienced through the channels of common perception. To the question, "Do witches fly?"—to which the liberal tradition from Johannes Nider to Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio and Johannes Wier replied no—Duerr gives an affirmative answer, though he does not agree with the equally affirmative *Malleus maleficarum*. Yes, witches fly, Duerr believes—through nonordinary reality, in the narrow border zone between wilderness and civilization.

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